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Introducing FIELD: Field Instructors Extending EBP Learning in Dyads

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Abstract:

Field Instructors Extending EBP Learning in Dyads (FIELD) has been crafted in consideration of the social work profession's need for innovative and collaborative models with field education that further evidence-based practice (EBP) implementation efforts. FIELD is driven by the continuing education interests of field instructors and the availability of local expertise, and it embraces the complementary strengths of students and field instructors. Herein, we provide the background for the development of such a curricula model and delineate model components. FIELD may offer a viable curricula option for synchronizing academic and field efforts toward sustainable social work workforce improvements.

Introduction

Equipping current and future social work practitioners with skills to engage in and deliver evidence-based practice (EBP) can be a significant challenge. One underutilized mechanism of disseminating and implementing EBP in social work is field education: specifically, through field instructors. Field instructors serve as primary mediators of student learning, with the ability to support, extend, or extinguish what students understand about EBP from the classroom. Given the social justice of bringing evidence-based interventions to vulnerable populations common to social work practice, we present a justification for the necessity of innovative curriculum models that consistently include field instructors. Herein, we present the rationale for the timeliness of such models informed by obstacles, opportunities, and varied perspectives on EBP within the social work profession, many of which are tied to the belief that EBP exclusively refers to manualized interventions. To address this state of affairs as well as the confusion about the meaning of EBP, we were compelled to craft a curriculum model for the field instructor and social work student dyad. FIELD capitalizes on current impetuses for EBP while simultaneously educating students and field instructors on both aspects of EBP: a process of decision-making (verb of EBP) and designated, well-specified, empirically supported inter-

ventions (noun of EBP). Within this paper, we offer a rationale for FIELD, explicate the model compo-
nents, and present a preliminary qualitative assessment of the feasibility of the model.

Current State of EBP Implementation in Social Work

Workforce Lacks Capacity to Deliver EBP

In spite of the many EBP interventions available, many practitioners have not developed the capacity
to implement innovative technologies and recent evidence-based practices (Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé,
Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Stirman et al., 2012). Training strategies and implementation efforts to
advance the use of EBP in the social work workforce have trailed behind the creation of interven-
tions (Beidas, Edmunds, Marcus, & Kendall, 2012; Lyon, Stirman, Kerns, & Bruns, 2011). Research has
illuminated the societal costs associated with the inability to implement evidence-based practices in
a timely fashion. For example, the astounding delay of an average of 17 or more years for EBPs to in-
filtrate practice settings has been well documented (Balas & Boren, 2000, 1999; Institutes of Medicine,
2001; New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003). Evidence related to the dissemination
of EBPs in social work settings increasingly indicates that few educational programs succeed in
equipping students with the necessary skills to effectively deliver EBP (Grimshaw et al. 2001; Hoge,
Huey, & O'Connell, 2004), though a competency-based curricula adopting evidence-based practice
education methods may systematically improve the workforce (Davis, O'Brien, & Freemantle, 1999;
Hoge et al., 2009; Mazmanian & Davis, 2002).

Developing proficiency in the delivery of EBPs requires integrated didactic and experiential training
methods, yet well over half of U.S. schools of social work do not offer this approach (Hoge et al., 2009;
Mullen, Schlonsky, Bledsoe, & Bellamy, 2005; Weissman, et al., 2006). By design, the majority of social
work programs offer incomplete training in EBP (Bledsoe et al., 2007) since they often "outsource" the
experiential teaching component to community-based field instructors who may lack familiarity with
EBP concepts (Mullen & Bacon, 2004).

Rationale for EBP Implementation

An Ethical Imperative for Social Work to Offer EBP

Social workers are the nation's main provider of mental health, substance abuse and child welfare
services to vulnerable populations (Heisler & Bagalman, 2014; Insel, 2004), and offering services
guided by EBP is more likely to demonstrate improved client outcomes (APA/CAPP Task Force
on Severe Mental Illness and Severe Emotional Disturbance, 2007; McHugo et al., 2007; Institutes
of Medicine, 2001), to meet the changing needs of clients, and to deliver culturally competent care
(Whaley & Davis, 2007). Vulnerable populations are entitled to programs, treatments, and interven-
tions deemed best practices (Weissman, 2006), and many in social work consider this capacity to
capably deliver services supported by research an ethical imperative (Myers & Thyer, 1997; Rubin,
2014; Thyer, 2014).

EBP Potential to Alleviate Staff Turnover

Staff turnover has long been damaging to the social work workforce, where annual rates often exceed 25 percent (Gallon, Gabriel, & Knudsen, 2003) whereas in child and adolescent services, rates of turnover can surpass 50 percent (Aarons & Sawitzky, 2006; Glisson, Dukes, & Green, 2006; Glisson & James, 2002). There is evidence that EBP implementation provides a protective factor against staff turnover (Aarons, Sommerfeld, Hecht, Silovsky, & Chaffin, 2009). However, the high turnover rates themselves serve as an impediment to efforts at implementing EBPs (Resnick & Rosenheck, 2009; Woltmann et al., 2008). Despite overwhelming evidence to advance an EBP implementation agenda, other challenges interfere.

Unique Challenges to Social Workers' Preparation to Deliver EBP

Multiple Definitions of EBP

There is a great deal of misunderstanding related to how to teach and discuss EBP (Rubin & Parrish, 2004; Mullen et al., 2005; Upshur & Tracy, 2004), as there are two ways in which EBP is understood. The first is a process of decision making (Mullen & Streiner, 2004; Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Sackett et al., 1996) that entails the search for and application of best available evidence to practice delivery. In collaboration with clients, the utility of such evidence is continually evaluated. Several social work programs have adopted this process model to organize course curriculum (Edmond, Mcgivern, Williams, Rochman, & Howard, 2006; Howard, McMillen, & Pollio, 2003; Thyer, 2007). Within this context, EBP is being used as a verb. The second definition refers to the designation of a particular intervention where improved outcomes for a population with specific diagnoses or conditions have empirical support. These designated EBPs have been referred to as evidence supported treatments (EST) or empirically supported interventions (Weissman et al., 2006). Examples include Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), and Multisystemic Therapy (MST). EBP is used as a noun in this context.

EBP Ideological Differences in Social Work

Further complicating the picture, vested stakeholders hold diverse positions regarding the cultural impact of evidence-based practice on the profession, clients, and field settings. There are concerns about inadequate discussion and debate on the merits of EBP and worries that the therapeutic alliance may be hindered by the delivery of specified interventions (Adams, Matto, & LeCroy, 2009). Another apprehension is the belief that there is an over-reliance on research guided by positivism (Mullen & Streiner, 2004; Rubin, 2011; Staller, 2006). Clinical judgment is the cornerstone of EBP (McNeill, 2006) as is the social worker's unique and artful use of self in engaging clients. Client voices are central to the process of EBP decision making. These numerous misconceptions result in the continued dismissal of EBP as a process of decision making and, therefore, undercut the possibility of implementing an empirically supported intervention (EBP as a noun). Both types of EBP are designed to avoid flaws in decision-making and the promotion of ineffective services (Gambrill, 2006; Rubin, 2011).

Although there is now a more conscientious effort to use EBP in diverse social work practice settings, including employment, child welfare, health, juvenile justice, mental health, and substance abuse (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009), some social workers actively resist the use of EBP (Gibbs, 2003; Nelson, Steele & Mize, 2006). Moreover, even when required to do so, many do not incorporate research evidence into their practice (Bledsoe et al., 2007; Mullen, Bledsoe, & Bellamy 2008). Research indicates studies attend more closely to the way in which empirically supported material is taught in psychotherapy training programs, focusing on psychologists and not social workers (Ravitz & Silver, 2004; Shernoff, Kratochwill, & Stoiber, 2003; Weissman et al., 2006).

An Opportune Time to Advance EBP Implementation in Social Work

Institutional Support from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

Historically, social work curriculum design was approached only from a content perspective. Over the years, to meet CSWE standards, new content was incrementally incorporated, leaving less room for practical application. However, according to the recent Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) instituted by the CSWE (2008), accreditation standards no longer mandate academic content, but rather, introduce the notion of requisite student competencies as the organizing principle for curriculum design (Holloway, Black, Hoffman, & Pierce, 2009). Competency-building necessarily relies on field instructors, as they are implementing practical elements of the curriculum.

Timing Is Everything

Current policy and advances in technology create a climate ripe for uptake of EBP in social work. Despite the challenges with integrating science and social work, managed care organizations are demanding that EBPs be employed for reimbursement. In addition, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act offers an historic opportunity to expand social work services for previously uninsured Americans (Alegria et al., 2012). There is also unprecedented access to electronic bibliographic databases (Howard et al., 2003; Soyden, 2007), systematic reviews, and meta-analyses (Littell, Corcoran, & Pillai, 2008). Finally, modeled after the Cochrane Library [Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR)], there are now clearinghouses focused specifically on evidence-based social work (for example, the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare) and related intervention outcomes (Soyden, Mullen, Alexandra, Rehnman, & Li, 2010) that make this an even more propitious time to move forward on this EBP training agenda for social workers.

Field Instructors: Lynchpins to Training Social Workers to Deliver EBP

Field education is understudied (Kurzman, 2011; Lager & Robbins, 2004) despite research that has suggested that the field instructor is far more influential in a students' learning and their development of professional social work identities when compared to the influence of classroom instructors (Bogo, Regehr, Hughes, Power, & Globerman, 2004, p. 417; Lager & Robbins, 2004). Consistent calls to examine the integration of field practice and academic curriculum (Council on Social Work Education, 2008; Miller, 2013; Tuchman & Lalane, 2011) have been made over decades (Carey

& McCardle, 2011). Suggested research on enhancing classroom/field integration have included training field instructors to transition from practitioner to teacher (Knight, 2000) and empirically examining the impact of training to establish best practices (Herschell, Kolko, Baumann, & Davis, 2010). However, the pleas are for bold systemic innovations rather than piecemeal approaches (Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010) toward developing highly qualified social work practitioners.

Wayne, Bogo, and Rastin (2010) discuss the irony of the centrality of field education in social work given that the EPAS, outlined by the CSWE, offer no pedagogical principles for field instruction beyond providing 900 hours of field education for master's students. There are no recommendations related to supervisory structure, format, or learning/teaching processes. Other than requiring a social work degree and two years of post-MSW-level experience, there are great variations in field instructor characteristics from setting to setting and program to program (Wayne, Bogo, & Rastin, 2010). This diversity holds great appeal but lacks consistency in student assignments, as some shadow and observe seasoned practitioners, while others are sent into solo practice experiences from the start (Fortune & Kaye, 2002; Homonoff, 2008; Mumm, 2006; Wayne, Bogo, & Rastin, 2010). Administrators, educators and practitioners alike are indebted to field instructors for their time and talent investments in social work education. However, Wayne, Bogo, and Rastin (2010) rightly express concern about the variability of field instruction experiences.

Special attention needs to be paid to the field instructor/social work supervisee relationship to better bridge the integration of EBP into social work training programs (Tebes et al., 2010). Bledsoe et al. (2007) suggest that further training field instructors could address the persistent concern that less than 40 percent of graduate programs in social work provide training in EBPs. An investigation aimed at increasing knowledge and skills related to EBP among New York's mental health human services workforce found that advanced-practice social work students were valued for their knowledge about EBP, yet as interns with no status or authority, they could not be the drivers of EBP implementation in agency settings (Stanhope, Tuchman, & Sinclair, 2010).

A Need for Innovative Educational Models Involving Field Instructors
Maximizing the effect of social work education in EBP requires utilizing the arrangement of field instructors and classroom education to better prepare students for the increasingly challenging contexts of agency practice (Mirabito, 2012). Field instructors seem to be willing promoters of EBP implementation, as research indicated that of 230 field instructors, 87 percent believed EBP would be useful in practice (Howard et al., 2003). New models of EBP training need to convey both ways in which EBP is understood, represent more than single-exposure training (Fixsen et al., 2005), and include experiential active learning components, such as behavioral role plays (Beidas & Kendall, 2010; Beidas et al., 2012), that result in improved adherence, competence, and skills. Models must be highly sensitive to issues of feasibility for successful inclusion of field instructors. In particular, time (Edmond et al., 2006) poses the primary obstacle to field instructor involvement. Supervising students is daunting

in the current climate, and Reisch and Jarman-Rohde (2000) have asserted that social work students increasingly must arrive at their internships prepared to learn more independently.

Teaching field instructor/student dyads the general concepts of the process of EBP as well as the specific introductory skills of a designated EBP may provide a platform for the field setting to develop greater capacity to reinforce classroom learning of EBPs. Linking the field instructor/social work intern relationship to EBP dissemination and implementation is possible. However, fundamental to this opportunity is the careful choice of method used to teach EBP process while selecting a designated EBP to introduce as an exemplar to the current generation of social work field instructors in tandem with the new generation of social workers. Arrangements for training will be unique to schools, as resources and schedules may vary and as some schools have taken other measures to translate EBP into field practice settings.

Rationale for and Strength of Dyad Design

Woody et al (2006) urge us to remember that field instructors are crucial to involve in curriculum development and training in EBP; and Mirabito (2012) suggests that we need more collaborative partnerships between faculty and field educators to maximize the integrity of the curricula and better prepare students for the increasingly challenging context of agency-based practice. Therefore, for the adoption of EBP to truly take place and gain a foothold in social work education, we posit that the student/field instructor dyad must be involved in being trained together. Further, Howard et al (2007) urge schools of social work to train field instructors in EBP methods and to aid in facilitating their access to electronic databases to enhance the potential for practice informed by research. Often, students have access to these databases while their field instructors do not; nor do they generally have the time and technical support to conduct these searches (see Table 1). The dyad design accounts for these issues of access while making use of students' technological sophistication. With students conducting the literature searches, field instructors have the opportunity for exposure to current EBP research. Moreover, field instructors utilize their clinical expertise and experience for interpreting and assessing the available research evidence.

Concurrent Teaching of EBP Process and Designated EBPS in Dyad Approach

When conducting trainings on EBP, a complementary strategy to train in both the process of EBP (verb) along with the concepts and skills of a designated EBP (noun) would seem to be most effective (Bellamy, Bledsoe, Mullen, Fang, & Manuel, 2008). This approach can aid in providing clarity regarding the two ways of defining EBP and ultimately reinforcing the active use of electronic literature searches to keep current with research that may be helpful in serving the client population most effectively. Training dyads of field instructors and their social work student interns has the potential to overcome past efforts that lacked systematic coordination to disseminate and implement EBP in the social work profession.

Introducing the FIELD Model

At a large MSW program on the East Coast, we developed the FIELD model to employ the complementary strategy of training in both the process of EBP (verb) along with the concepts and skills of a designated EBP (noun) to provide clarity regarding the two ways EBP is understood. In choosing a designated EBP to incorporate into FIELD, we elected to offer didactic and experiential training on an EBP in which field instructors expressed interest. Engagement in FIELD is not mandatory but optional and driven by the continuing education desires of field instructors and curriculum content/ learning interests of students. Both field instructors and students at our school expressed interest in learning more about Motivational Interviewing (MI). Given that MI met model selection criteria for an EBP and interest incentivized participation, we selected MI as our exemplar EBP, which will be described in more detail later. Additionally, since field instructors typically need to obtain continuing education credits, we offered free continuing education credits as an incentive for participating in FIELD.

We explicate FIELD model elements in three tables herein and emphasize that adaptation is unique to social work schools, as resources and previous measures taken to translate EBP into field practice settings vary. FIELD embraces complementary strengths that social work students and their field instructors bring to bear, rather than viewing these attributes as limitations (see Table 1). Students are typically more sophisticated and experienced in searching literature, given access provided by their educational institutions and classroom expectations to do so; further, if students were born in the 1980s or later, they are more likely to be digital natives. Likewise, field instructors, as practice experts, have developed more artful means with which to engage communities and client populations and can devote their limited time to assessing and applying the evidence to the "real world" of the practice setting. FIELD has field instructors relying on students to "bring the research" by searching the literature on the selected EBP as applied to their client population/agency setting, while field instructors interpret research evidence and mentor and guide students on delivering the evidence, thus extending classroom education into practice contexts.

Curriculum design features (see Table 2) for FIELD include general model elements, field instructor model elements, and student model elements. These component parts can serve as a guide for schools to design adapted variants of FIELD unique to the school and community needs.

Criteria for Selection of EBP for FIELD

The selection of an EBP for FIELD is critical. Specific criteria used for choosing an EBP (see Table III) pertain to field instructors' interests as consumers of continuing education, as well as interest expressed by the student community. Other criteria relates to the compatibility of the EBP with social work values and the availability of expertise for ongoing consultation. Furthermore, the EBP selected must be applicable to the diverse settings where social workers practice and be relatively uncomplicated to teach and learn in a short time frame, as research has demonstrated that complex EBPs are

far less likely to be implemented in practice (Ager, Roahen-Harrison, Toriello, et al., 2011; Amodeo, Lundgren, Cohen, et al., 2011).

Exemplar EBP in FIELD Pilot

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is an EBP applicable in a variety of social work settings where mental health, substance abuse, and child welfare services are provided. MI is increasingly taught in social work programs and found effective with an array of populations social workers commonly encounter in practice. MI can be employed in conjunction with more complex EBPs and delivered within brief case management encounters.

MI was selected because the inherent spirit and techniques are consonant with social work values (Hohman, 2011), and there is a rich body of evidence to support effectiveness with a variety of vulnerable populations served by social workers (Lundahl, Kunz, Brownell, Tollefson, & Burke, 2010). MI is a client-centered approach that aims to facilitate exploration and resolution of ambivalence (Miller & Rollnick, 2004) related to change in health, mental health, substance use, and child welfare risk behaviors. MI is closely aligned with the harm reduction model (van Wormer, 2007). Originally created by William Miller, MI has strong intuitive appeal, and its basic formulation parallels the strengths perspective of social work practice (van Wormer & Davis, 2002).

Feasibility of FIELD

We conducted a preliminary implementation of the FIELD model with 20 student–field instructor dyads participating. Participants were enthusiastic about learning MI techniques but less keen to learn about the process of EBP. Participants were generally appreciative of coaching on the steps of the EBP process, in which the literature was searched for the application of MI to their own field settings. Data from the qualitative responses indicated that all participants believed it was important to use research to inform practice. One field instructor working with foster care youth was helped by her student to locate a study that described the efficacy of a group-delivered MI intervention. She had struggled with birth parents' substance use in her agency setting and was highly impressed with the discovery of the versatility of MI. Some field instructors who wanted to learn about MI were appreciative that their students would be a part of FIELD. Several expressed that students "could really use it," implying that FIELD might reinforce their supervisory efforts. Finally, regarding the booster session, which included expert clinical feedback on participants' fidelity to MI from practice audiotapes along with a written "check in" about the steps of the EBP process, many field instructors and students alike reported that this was the first time they were directly evaluated and provided feedback on a practice technique, which they found immensely helpful.

Conclusion

Schools of social work have an important leadership role when it comes to EBP implementation within the social work workforce. This effort has proved more difficult than researchers previously

estimated (Grady, 2010), and new models must reflect the complexity of social work practice while capitalizing on natural partnerships inherent in professional education (Proctor, 2007). One novel approach to this challenge is the FIELD model. FIELD capitalizes on the rich and existing resources provided by the variety of field instructors in social work education and furthers CSWE goals of promoting competence-based education in manageable and sustainable ways. Attending to the current generation of social workers by making strategic educational investments that include field instructors has rich potential toward ongoing service improvements in the social work workforce.

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Table 1. Advantages of dyad design in FIELD.

- Students bring access to electronic data bases, typically possess technological strengths as digital natives and can be assigned time to conduct electronic searches of literature.

- Field instructors typically bring rich and varied practice experiences that aid in interpreting literature searches.

- Field instructors usually have interest in learning EBP.

- Faculty supported by field instructors equipped to become EBP extenders with greater capacity to support didactic training provided in classroom setting.

- Potential for cross fertilization of academia and field by integrating EBP classroom education with field instructor continuing education needs.

- Opportunity to train current and new generation of social workers.

Table 2. General model elements of FIELD.

General Model elements	• Training in process of EBP (verb) briefly conducted along with training in designated EBP (noun).
	• Eligible designated EBPs applicable to populations social workers typically encounter in their field settings.
	• Schools consult local experts in crafting condensed skills- focused curriculum to introduce designated EBP both didactically and experientially.
	• Trainings designed to be brief (e.g. 1 to 1 ½ days or 3 half days) to feasibly include field instructors and students and a follow up experiential activity to occur later in the field placement setting as part of strategic experiential booster.
	• Preferably, field instructors trained first and prior to pairing with student intern to sensitize them to supervisory/teaching role in context of process of EBP and introductory features of designated EBP.
	• Following training, field instructor/student dyads "practice" EBP via audiotaped practice session.
	• Preferably, members of the dyad practice with one another. However, the main goal is to have each member perform in the clinician role even if the practice sessions occur with another colleague.
	• Audio file of practice session sent to expert in designated EBP for evaluation of fidelity assessment of their implementation of the designated EBP.
	• Feedback provided to dyad on fidelity of implementing the designated EBP.
	• Training in process of EBP reviewed with members of the dyad of field instructor and social work student in post-training booster communication occurring from 2 weeks to 1 month post student training.
	• Dyads are responsible for search of the literature, specifically, applicability of designated EBP with specific groups of clients served in their field setting.
	• A member of the dyad produces a "report" on findings from literature review.
	• Booster session collaboratively crafted with the expert in the designated EBP who conducted the fidelity assessment of the EBP. Information to be imparted based on the results of the fidelity assessment.
	• Field instructors receive certificates of training on designated EBP.

Table 2. General model elements of FIELD (continued)

	Field instructors Model elements	• Field instructors, in need of continuing education opportunities, are not researchers, but instead are drivers in selecting the designated EBP for the teaching model • Eligible field instructors supervising social work students in practice placements that allow for some application of new clinical competencies. • If possible, field instructors attend training at no cost as well as earn continuing education units. • Field instructors supply typical vignette(s) representing client challenges in their practice setting in advance of/during training. • Field instructors agree that student earns field hours for this training early in semester. • Agree to apply EBP in their practice.
	Students Model elements	• Students in practicum settings where they have opportunities to apply skills of designated EBP. • Training for students occurs on field placement days agreed upon with field instructor. • Given that students have greater access to electronic data bases, they take lead in searching literature on applicability of designated EBP to client population served in their field setting. Material reviewed in supervision with field instructors who can ground literature in experience with client population and in understanding setting/organization as to feasibility of intervention strategies. • Agree to apply EBP in field placement. • Students receive certificates of training on designated EBP.

Table 3. EBP selection criteria for FIELD

- EBP appealing to the community based field instructors that supervise student field internships.

- EBP of interest to student community while in line with academic goals.

- EBP generally applicable to populations that diversity of social workers encounter in practice settings.

- EBP straightforward to teach and uncomplicated to learn.

- EBP client centered and compatible with social work values.

- EBP fidelity assessment procedure available.

- Selection of EBP based on local expertise available for consultation in design of both didactic and experiential training.

- Local expert(s) available for ongoing consultation.